

Sustain Mid Maine Coalition

Public Policy Team

Meeting Minutes

April 27, 2015

The meeting started at about 6:05 at the REM Board Room.

Members present: Rob Ellis, Tom Tietenberg, Doug Carnrick, Dick Thomas, Jane Edwards, and Elery Keene.,

Jane chaired the meeting. Minutes were taken by Elery.

Minutes: Dick made a motion to amend the draft minutes changing the comments of Peter Garrett relating to “Complete Streets Policy” to:

“Peter motioned that the legislature has a proposal for “Complete Streets Policy” which would make streets friendlier for pedestrian and bicycle travel. The SMMC Transportation Team wants the City of Waterville to adopt a Complete Streets Policy. He mentioned that College Avenue in Waterville would benefit by the city doing this.”

This was seconded by Tom. All present voted in favor.

Brief activity reports and information sharing among members:

Rob Ellis said that he is working on a draft for an “op-ed” piece to be printed in the newspaper as one of the monthly SMMC op-ed. It will be about solar farms. He is in favor of increasing the number of persons that can share electricity from a display of solar panels at one location.

Tom Tietenberg is following legislative proposals being considered by the Energy, Utilities, and Technology committee. He said that he testified before the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee in support of LD 1215, which would insert the word “and” where it belongs in legislation that was approved last year. Because of the way the PUC dealt with the missing “and” (the word “and” was left out in a vital place in a what is called the “Omnibus bill”, about \$38 million dollars that was meant to be available to the Efficiency Maine program will not be available for the year starting in January 2016.

Tom commented on another legislative item that would re-insert the missing “and” and also do some other things, including creating and adding two more persons to the staff of Patrick Woodcock who is Director of the Governor’s Energy Office. Efficiency Maine would contribute \$300,000 to help pay for this program.

Dick Thomas said that 350 Central Maine is planning to have a press conference on the proposal for the state of Maine to spend up to \$75 million a year for 20 years to help fund construction of a pipeline to bring fracked natural gas from Pennsylvania to New England. He thinks that this money could be better invested in non-fossil fuel energy production.

We have seen a report by the PUC on this in which PUC Commissioner David Littell was strongly opposed to this commitment of funding for a natural gas pipeline.

All participated in a discussion of this, agreeing that it looks like a pretty bad idea. We think that this money would come from an increase in the price of electricity distributed to Maine users. Legislation to authorize the Public Utilities Commission to do this was included in the Omnibus Energy Bill during the 2014 legislative session.

Elery said that he was told by a member of the staff of the Public Advocate that a consultant had been hired to study this and give a report to the PUC in early May of this year.

Tom would like for us to be able to see this report as soon as possible after it is produced so that we could better understand what is being proposed. He would also like for us to be able to offer our recommendation regarding this proposal before a final decision is made by the PUC.

Jane said that she would like to have a knowledgeable speaker come to our area to explain this and other related electricity production and distribution information for Maine customers. This occasion might be open to other members of SMMC and possibly others as well.

Tom said that he thought it might be good to have a panel of speakers who could talk about this and perhaps other topics as well. Patrick Woodcock and David Littell might be appropriate for this. Someone from the office of the Public Advocate might be included.

It was the consensus that this might be a good idea, but we would like to know more than we do right now to plan for this. We would want to be sure of having a good sized audience to listen to such a panel. It might be best to do this when local colleges are in session because many students might be interested.

Dick Thomas plans to talk with someone in the office of the Public Advocate about this to find out when the consultant's report will become available and if the PUC will conduct a public hearing on the report.

Doug Carnrick mentioned that the SMMC Executive Board will be having a retreat on May 14 and May 15 to discuss the status of what SMMC is doing and prioritize ideas about where we want to go. This will be facilitated by Elizabeth Reuthe, a skilled facilitator.

It was decided that the next meeting of the Public Policy team will be at 6:00 p.m. on May 18, 2015. This is the third Monday of the month because the fourth Monday is a holiday. Hopefully we can have some discussion of the consultant's report about funding for a natural gas pipeline from Pennsylvania to New England. We might also be able to get a verbal report on what happens at the Board retreat. We will also plan on a meeting on June 22, the fourth Monday in June. But we may decide not to have that meeting depending on what might be available for an agenda.

We did not have meetings during the summer of 2014, but Jane said that she hoped that those of us in town during the summer would continue to meet, perhaps on some issue that would be of interest to

other SMMC teams, or about advancing the goals of SMMC as they evolved through the Board retreat and follow up Board meetings. We will make the decision together as we go through the summer.

Tom mentioned that if we invite speakers from the PUC, etc. to talk about Maine Energy policies and factors which contribute to energy costs, etc. we want to have a good sized audience, which might be more likely to happen when in September and later when the colleges are back in session. Planning and arrangements for such events could be done during the summer.

Elery mentioned a report that was passed out to committee members at the meeting which was an article in a magazine produced by the American Society of Civil Engineers. It is about things that major cities around the world are doing to increase the energy efficiency of their buildings. This may be further discussed at our next meeting. Elery did mention that Steve Errario, a Colby student, who was hired to do an inventory of municipal buildings, issued a report suggesting certain things to improve energy efficiency. Winslow followed through with improvements to the Winslow library. It might be good to get an update on what other things might have been done by area communities.

Elery mentioned that Alder Stone Fuller will be speaking on Thursday, April 30, at the KVCOG meeting room. It is open to the public. He passed out an information sheet about the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at about 7:45 p.m.

Elery Keene